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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA'S PRESIDENT ENJOYING A HONEYMOON WITH THE PUBLIC

¶1. (SBU) Summary. A leading Argentine polling firm (Poliarquia) found that President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's (CFK) standing rose by five points since she took office December 10, with 56% of those polled rating her favorably, despite foreign policy missteps in early weeks. This is far below the exceptional 80% positive rating her predecessor Nestor Kirchner enjoyed a month after his 2003 inauguration, but Poliarquia's analysts believe CFK will keep climbing in the months ahead. The Director of another major polling firm, Manuel Mora y Araujo, told the Ambassador that the rise also reflects two factors: 1) most Argentines don't pay attention to foreign relations; and 2) anti-Americanism still strikes a popular chord. End summary.

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A good start  
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¶2. (SBU) Poliarquia conducted its latest national survey from January 3 through January 11 in the largest urban centers of Argentina, precisely where the President received her lowest support in the October 28 elections, which she won with 45% of the vote nationwide. Of those polled, 56% rated CFK favorably, an increase of five points since her December 10 inauguration. Only 25% of the respondents rendered a below-average assessment, whereas 12% of the population surveyed had a negative impression of her. CFK's negative image decreased six points during her first month in office.

¶3. (SBU) Although her predecessor Nestor Kirchner received 80% favorable opinions during his first month in power, Poliarquia's analysts believe CFK's administration is paying a public relations price for being viewed as an extension of her husband's administration. Poliarquia foresees a possible climb in the following months, after which she may come to a standstill or begin to lose support, a common pattern showed by previous administrations.

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador met January 23 with Manuel Mora y Araujo, who heads another major polling and consulting firm, as well as serving as president of Di Tella University. He said the poll results reinforce the notion that most Argentines don't give high priority to foreign policy. Thus, CFK's over-reaction to a court case in Miami and her husband's questionable involvement in a Colombian hostage release did not really register as negatives for many Argentines. Indeed, one area where sadly many Argentines are quite willing to pay attention is with conspiracy theories and criticism of the U.S, he said.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: CFK got off to a bumpy start in her first month in office, most notably with the crisis in bilateral relations with the United States triggered by her over-reaction to the damaging allegations made by Venezuelan agents on trial in Miami. There were some other ugly incidents along the way, such as labor leader Hugo Moyano's heavy-handed attempt to bully her, and her husband's ill-fated expedition to the Colombian jungle as a "guarantor" of Hugo Chavez's hyped hostage release. CFK was also criticized for spending half of her first month as president on vacation, holed up

in her country home in southern Argentina. Given these circumstances, it is surprising that her ratings climbed at all, but clearly the urban public is using other measures.

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